

To the Honorable members of the GAE Committee and the General Assembly:

My name is Kenneth Speyer. I reside in New Britain, CT.

I am writing in support of HB 5262 and SB 184, which primarily concern voting by absentee ballot.

First, these bills would extend through this year's election the provision allowing voters a choice: to vote in person or by absentee ballot. I am 72 years old with diabetes, both of which place me at increased risk from COVID. I am vaccinated, but vaccination is less effective against the Omicron variant. I am very cautious about going into public buildings, especially where there are likely to be unmasked people or a large number of people. I have not eaten in an indoor restaurant since the pandemic began, because people cannot mask effectively while eating. I generally avoid entering public buildings where masks are not required, or crowded places even if masked are required.

Just as the state should not discriminate against some voters by requiring them to wear masks while voting, we also should not discriminate against the many people, including me, who would risk their lives and health by voting in person where many others are unmasked. Absentee ballots have proven to be secure, safe and convenient in Connecticut, and voters should have the choice to use them so long as the pandemic continues.

These bills also remove several discriminations in voting which are not specifically related to COVID. Anyone whose health would be at risk from illness in the community – whether from COVID, a future flu outbreak, or any other communicable disease, and whether the danger applies to many people or a few – should have the choice to protect his or her health by voting by absentee ballot. A voter who is caring for a sick or disabled family member should not be forced to leave their family member to vote, nor to risk exposing a family member with impaired immunity to illness upon returning home. Commuters – including those who work out of state – should not be required to get up earlier or extend their workday later to vote in their town of residence. Voting is a civic duty, but it should not impose a disproportionate burden of some people because of their life circumstances.

All of these changes are consistent with our state constitution, and so not dependent on any constitutional amendment.

None of these provisions prevent anyone who chooses to vote at the polls from doing so. They do not tell anyone how to cast their ballot, nor require anyone to vote. They extend a choice to all voters, making our democracy broader and fairer to all.

Thank you.